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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR WARE'S MEETING WITH PRESIDENT AHTISAARI

REF: HELSINKI 1210

Classified By: AMBASSADOR WARE FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

11. (C) SUMMARY: UN Special Envoy Martti Ahtisaari told Ambassador Ware that he remains determined to deliver his recommendations for Kosovo's final status within two weeks of Serbia's Jan. 21 election, fearing that any delays will "destabilize" Kosovo. Ahtisaari "would find it rather strange" if Moscow used its veto in the UNSC; however, he is not yet as confident as Washington and Berlin are that Russia will abstain. Like the Finnish Government, he is working hard to maintain EU unity and is "pressuring" the incoming German EU Presidency to continue that effort. He continues to dialogue with other UNSC members to ensure their support, but President Putin has not responded to his offer to meet. As for Serbia, Ahtisaari said that PM Kostunica is "hopeless" and will press Belgrade to stall as long as possible. The international community also "lost some credibility on ICTY" when NATO offered PfP to Serbia, although he acknowledged that the gesture did serve the important function of shoring up President Tadic. Ahtisaari expressed great appreciation for USG support of his efforts and for the collaboration with Ambassador Wisner. End Summary.

Russian Uneasiness

12. (C) UN Special Envoy for the Future Status Process in Kosovo and former Finnish President Martti Ahtisaari called on Ambassador Ware Dec. 7. Ambassador opened the discussion by telling Ahtisaari that President Halonen -- who has had several conversations with President Putin over the course of Finland's EU Presidency -- had expressed "uneasiness" (reftel) about how Russia might respond should Serbia reject Ahtisaari's recommendations regarding Kosovo's final status. (Halonen has previously told the Ambassador that Putin's views stem from his "experiences" in the Caucuses and with Islamic extremism.)

13. (C) Ahtisaari responded that Halonen has communicated that view to him as well and that in many ways he shares her concerns. Putin fears a "shrinking of the Orthodox world," Ahtisaari explained, in this case the establishment of a small Muslim state in the Balkans to which the international community will pay attention for five years, then abandon. More disturbingly, Russia continues to argue that Kosovo's independence would set a precedent for the "frozen conflicts" on Russia's borders -- an argument Ahtisaari views as a signal that Russia has joined Serbia in seeking "to deny what occurred in 1999." He noted that his report to the UN will argue specifically that if Moscow and Belgrade want to "send a message that what Milosevic did was OK and that sovereign

borders are holy," that will prove a sad commentary on both countries' values. Given the gravity of other problems facing Russia, "I would find it rather strange, at the end of the day, if Moscow did not cooperate" on Kosovo, Ahtisaari said. Nevertheless, he added, Washington and Berlin are confident that Russia will abstain in the UNSC, but "I am not yet so confident."

Lining up Support

14. (C) Ahtisaari has requested a meeting with President Putin to discuss his concerns and to help move Russia toward at least an abstention in the UNSC. However, he said, Putin has not yet accepted the offer, saying there are no new points that he has not heard already. Ahtisaari is also directly lobbying EU member states and current or incoming UNSC members. Some (he named South Africa, Spain, Romania, Sweden and Slovakia) have needed more persuading than he would have expected, while Italy, the UK and the US have provided the strongest voices of support. Finland has done a good job of maintaining EU unity during its Presidency, Ahtisaari added, and he is "pressing Germany" to continue that effort.

15. (C) In the end, of course, everything depends on the main protagonists, with Serbia continuing to stall and to press for unrealistic concessions from the Kosovars. Ahtisaari believes that any delay would "destabilize Kosovo;" to emphasize the seriousness of his point, he has begun arguing that he will recommend that the Finnish Government withdraw its troops from Kosovo if there is any delay beyond the late January/early February timeframe he has established. As for Serb intransigence, PM Kostunica "is hopeless" and continues to lobby Russia

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and neighboring states for delays. President Tadic "is the only democrat left" and needs to be supported, Ahtisaari said. In that regard, he specifically raised NATO's offer of PFP membership to Serbia, saying that while Europe and the US "lost some credibility on ICTY cooperation," the decision did have the upside of supporting Tadic.

Comment

16. (SBU) Going into the home stretch, Ahtisaari appeared about as confident as could be expected. He expressed great appreciation for US support, noting specifically that the naming of Amb. Wisner as the Secretary's Special Representative was a "marvelous stroke" and that collaboration with the US has been "first class." The Ambassador offered the Embassy's assistance if it should in any way prove useful.

WARE